



# Consumer Perceptions of Product-Claim vs. Help-Seeking Direct to Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs

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## Introduction

Direct-to-Consumer Advertising (DTCA). DTCA refers to advertisements that are directed to patients, the final consumers of the pharmaceutical product. In the U.S., the FDA permits three different types of DTCA:

- Product-claim ads, which mention the name of the drug, outline its use, and describe the risks and benefits, in addition to discussing the medical condition it treats;
- Help-seeking ads, which discuss the medical condition but do not mention a specific drug product; and
- Reminder ads, which provide the name of the drug but do not discuss its uses, risks, or benefits, nor the medical condition it treats.

The purpose of this research is to better understand the effectiveness of Direct-to-Consumer Advertising (DTCA) by examining consumer perceptions of persuasive intent and informativeness associated with product-claim and help-seeking ads.

## Key Concepts & Hypotheses

### PERSUASIVE INTENT OF DTCA

the degree to which consumers infer the intent of the ad to profit-based, convincing consumers to seek prescriptions for the advertised drug

H1. Product-claim (vs. help-seeking) ads a) are associated with higher (lower) persuasive intent and thus b) decrease (increase) behavioral intent to seek treatment for the advertised ailment.

### INFORMATIVENESS OF DTCA

the degree to which the ad provides consumers with facts about the advertised disease and/or its treatments

H2. Help-seeking (vs. product-claim) ads a) are associated with higher (lower) informativeness and thus b) increase (decrease) behavioral intent to seek treatment for the advertised ailment.

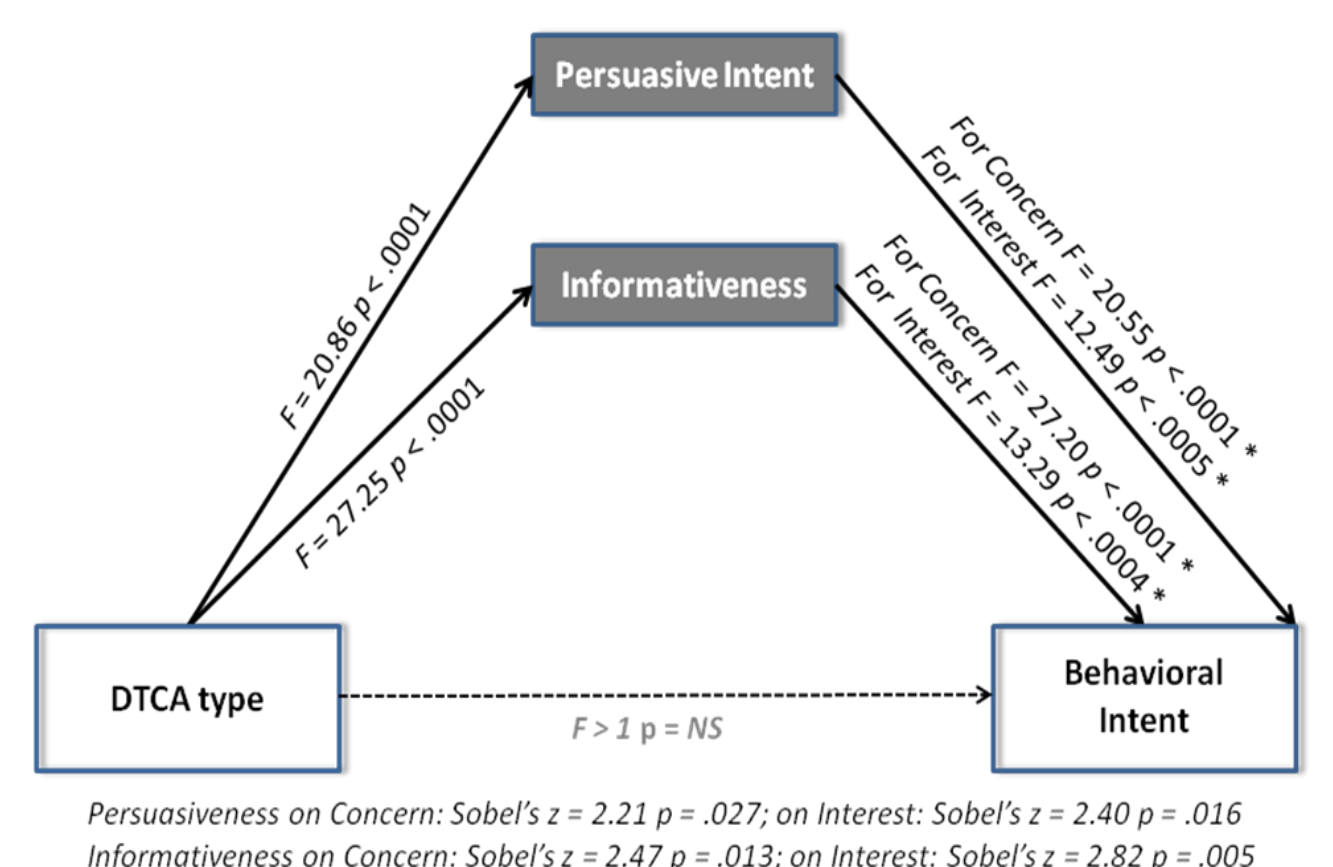
## Results

H1a : Consumers perceived product-claim DTCA as having higher persuasive intent than help-seeking DTCA ( $p = .0010$ ).

H2a : Consumers perceived help-seeking ads as more informative than product-claim ads ( $p = .0053$ )

H1b and H2b: Help-seeking ads were associated with higher concern about the advertised disease ( $p = .0360$ ) and higher interest to learn more about the advertised disease ( $p = .0141$ )

### Mediation Analysis



## Methodology

We conducted two pilot studies (to determine relevant symptoms and to simplify product-claim DTCA) and a main experiment.

### DESIGN

2 × 2 between-subjects factorial design for the advertised ailments of migraine and clinical depression, varying the type of DTCA as product-claim or help-seeking.

### STIMULI

Print ads for two medical conditions (migraine and clinical depression).

### SAMPLE

162 respondents, recruited at a mall in the northeastern U.S., voluntarily participated in the experiment. They ranged in age from 19 to 40, with females comprising 49%.

### DEVELOPED SCALES

PERSUASIVE INTENT	Cronbach's alpha = .90
• THE ADVERTISER JUST WANTS TO SELL THE DRUG FOR [DISEASE].	
• THE WAY THIS AD TRIES TO PERSUADE PEOPLE SEEMS ACCEPTABLE TO ME. (REVERSE-CODED)	
• THE ADVERTISER TRIES TO PERSUADE THE AUDIENCE IN WAYS THAT I DON'T LIKE.	
• THE ADVERTISER SEEMS TO BE TRYING TO INAPPROPRIATELY PERSUADE THE CONSUMER AUDIENCE.	
• THE ADVERTISER IS BEING PERSUASIVE WITHOUT BEING EXCESSIVELY MANIPULATIVE. (REVERSE-CODED)	
INFORMATIVENESS	Cronbach's alpha = .93
• THE ADVERTISER WANTS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON [DISEASE].	
• THE ADVERTISER WANTS TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS ON [DISEASE].	
• THE ADVERTISER CARES ABOUT PEOPLE'S HEALTH.	
• THE ADVERTISER WANTS TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT [DISEASE].	
• THE ADVERTISER WANTS TO HELP THOSE WHO MAY HAVE [DISEASE].	

## Background

In the U.S., DTCA has grown rapidly since 1997 when the Food and Drug Administration liberated the regulations. In 2003, the U.S. pharmaceutical industry spent a total of \$ 3.8 billion (USD) on DTCA delivered through television, radio, print, the Internet, and other media (Elliott, 2004), representing a 24.5% increase from the prior year (Toshi, 2004). In 2005, industry-wide spending on DTCA reached \$4.2 billion (USD) (GAO, 2006), and it further increased to \$5.6 billion (USD) in 2006 (Stremersch and Lemmens, 2009).

Currently, only the U.S. and New Zealand permit DTCA, but the rest of the world soon may follow suit, as several other countries (Europe, Australia, and Canada) are considering permitting DTCA (Auton, 2006; Eagle and Chamberlain, 2004; Harker and Harker, 2007).

## Contributions

1. Our findings help reconcile the incompatible findings in the previous literature, by distinguish between the two types of DTCA – namely, product-claim and help-seeking ads.
2. We assess DTCA effectiveness in terms of behavioral intent (i.e., interest in learning more about and desire to obtain care for the advertised medical condition), rather than using secondary data typically associated with empirical studies (e.g., prescription number or sales revenue).
3. Our results can assist pharmaceutical firms in better utilizing DTCA. Given our results, practitioners may want to consider the drawbacks of product-claim DTCA – specifically, consumer perceptions of high persuasive intent and low informativeness. Conversely, practitioners may want to recognize help-seeking DTCA's potential for improving behavioral intent of the advertised medical conditions through its association with consumer perceptions of low persuasive intent and high informativeness.